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## THE ROUND TABLE

"SHAKESPEARE AND ZANE GREY"

### I

The *English Journal* is of vital interest to every teacher and student of literature. It not only furnishes material that is helpful to the teacher of English, but it also serves as a stimulus to promote better thinking and writing among students. Oftentimes students, especially high-school Seniors, ask to read certain articles in the *Journal* to which I have referred in class. Just the other day a discussion arose as to what writer the average high-school Senior considered the best interpreter of life. Many thought Shakespeare the most interesting. Others preferred Zane Grey and Harold Bell Wright.

I immediately seized the opportunity of telling them about the interesting experiment on the same question which was carried out in the Northern State Normal School in Marquette, Michigan. I referred to the article contributed by Mr. James Cloyd Bowman to the November number of the *Journal*.

The next day one of the members of the class asked if he might write an answer to the theme on "The Kind of Writing I Like Best" which also appeared in the November issue of the magazine. He said that he believed that the boy who had written the theme might still be enlightened as to the real value of Shakespeare.

### A REPLY

In reply to the article on "The Kind of Writing I Like Best" may I state that I, too, prefer American novels to any other form of literature, but only from the standpoint of loyalty. The writer states that to prove this point of preference in novels, he will briefly discuss Shakespeare. I have yet to learn after a few years of English that Shakespeare was a novelist.

However, I also enjoy Shakespeare. I read *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, all of which I have studied in high school as required subjects. I, too, read passages that had and were to live forever, and I was equally surprised to find that my memory never failed me when I wished to quote Shakespeare. I can see why Shakespeare is handed down. His works, first of all, are universal. To some he may lack human interest and freedom of expression. On the contrary, however, when properly read, intense interest is aroused and great pleasure is derived from learning the deep, underlying meaning of a Shakespearian expression.

The coarseness in his works can also be explained. He is writing about all people in the world; the very good type, and the very bad. To make the contrast effective and true to life it is almost necessary to use the so-called coarseness of expression. It may not please the fastidious reader, but it is nevertheless realistic, and any literature that is to be permanent must be real.

I quote, "If the average writer of today were to write a story in which ghosts, witches, and spirits play a prominent part, the story would never get by the publisher." This may be possibly true, and yet no writer has ever attempted such mysterious stories centering spirits, realizing the difficulties of exactly and correctly placing each appearance of ghosts or witches. Every appearance of such characters are exactly placed in the correct, precise, dramatic moment by Shakespeare.

Wright, Porter, Clemens and Grey may be novelists of the first class, as the writer has stated, but yet none can excel Shakespeare in his literary masterpieces. All of the writers first mentioned are very interesting and really do come with a direct appeal to the heart of the reader, but yet none has been so interesting to all people, of all rank, nationality and ability as has Shakespeare. He wrote for the pleasure of all, while others wrote for certain classes who were interested in one specialty. Zane Grey is an excellent example of this. In his western and out-of-door stories he depicts life wonderfully; his descriptions are rare and most beautiful, his interest to readers never ceases, but yet his books are not interesting nor are his descriptions beautiful to those who do not care for this one particular phase of life. This is not true of any of Shakespeare's work. "In Hamlet, himself," said a critic, "there is little less than the whole science of human nature drawn together and condensed."

Think of the lasting qualities of the Shakespearian era. There certainly must be some good in those works, and when attempting to learn the reason, we unconsciously fall in love with that author and keep on delving into those romantic books, and then we wonder if our modern authors will appeal to all, centuries hence. It doesn't seem possible.

EDWIN KEHR

This is not the first time I have discussed the matter freely with high-school students and wondered at the gratifying results. I firmly believe that high-school students learn to appreciate Shakespeare with the same degree of intensity as the ideas have been impressed upon them.

MARGERY J. BARRY

## II

### ANOTHER PROTEST

In comparing Shakespeare with modern authors, I personally believe that the difference between Shakespeare and modern writers is so great as to make a good comparison almost impossible.

Some modern authors are better than others, but if a popular writer such as Zane Grey is taken into consideration, it could be more easily understood.

The writer of today may have an exceedingly large number of books to his credit, but if one reads many of them they become monotonous; the reason is easily perceived. The books are all on similar subjects and almost exactly the same expressions and descriptions of characters and scenes are used and re-used in all the books. The modern authors' style is set; they seem to place great "stock" on finding their style; when they get started on a type of subject-matter nothing can divert them from their course. Zane Grey, for example, writes almost entirely on subjects pertaining to the wild and "woolly" West. The main character is usually a young Easterner, who tires of life in the East and goes West to do something. He then becomes marvelously proficient with a gun in an equally amazing duration of time, discovers a beautiful maiden in distress, goes through a series of hardships, ending with a big fight, and comes out victorious after rescuing said maiden. Of course, there are variations.

Shakespeare is equally good whether his subject-matter is tragedy, comedy, or history. A person may read Shakespeare a hundred times and disclose some new meaning or some hidden thought every time. Shakespeare is an education in itself. Shakespeare did not only weave a story around the characters, but develops them. It takes real genius to write *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, with its fancifulness, fairies, and lightness, and *Macbeth*, with its witches, murder, and gloom.

Grey may be all right when one wishes to read only for entertainment, but the reading is not inspiring. One seldom cares to read his books more than once, because the meaning is so very obvious; everything is on the surface. Grey is read by those of this generation. But what will the coming time think of him? He will not be known.

Shakespeare has survived three centuries and he is admired and received more and more as time goes by. If he were not superior to modern authors, would he not have been dropped long ago?

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HOISINGTON, KANSAS

MARY STICKNEY<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We quote a part of the letter from Miss Anna C. Rearick which accompanied this theme:

"I read this article 'Shakespeare and Zane Grey' to them and so many of them seemed to think it absurd to think of making any sort of comparison that I asked them to write their own honest opinions. I am sending you two of the best. Most of the class of thirty-eight pupils expressed much the same ideas. A few students expressed a decided dislike for Shakespeare, while a few others said they had not read enough of either author to be fair judges."

## III

I am glad to report the following classroom experiment as an offset to Mr. Bowman's experience. Following the study of *Silas Marner* with a class of Sophomores, I asked each member to choose any modern novel, such as a "best-seller," and compare it with George Eliot's story. This class consisted of thirty-four boys and one girl. It was not above the average class in scholarship; in fact, it was quite mediocre. The boys were even a rather rough set, hard to manage and far from amenable to discipline.

I awaited the results of my test with great expectation. When the papers were read, this significant fact stood out first. Almost every person had chosen a Zane Grey story! I discovered then and there how great a hold this writer has gained on our young people.

But to my great satisfaction, and I will confess, to my surprise, with two or three exceptions, every student declared George Eliot to be a greater writer of stories than Zane Grey. Following are some of the reasons:

1. *Silas Marner* a truer picture of real life.
2. The events in Zane Grey's books too highly colored and improbable.
3. His heroes too good-looking and his heroines too perfect.
4. Doubtfulness of Zane Grey's novels enduring as long as George Eliot's.
5. Absence in Zane Grey's books of anything of permanent value to the reader.
6. George Eliot's structure and writing superior to Grey's.

Some of these opinions were expressed in school-boy "parlance"; others were given with the limited vocabularies of high-school Sophomores; not all were couched in the terms of the literary critic. But almost unanimously this class of boys realized that they had been studying a book which they knew to be superior to many of the stories they read every day. Their frank opinion was asked, and it was given frankly. They found that Zane Grey could write an interesting tale perhaps; but they also discovered that, measured by certain standards, he falls short.

L. WINIFRED TERRY

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